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(54) **EXHAUST CONNECTION MEMBER WITH BRAIDED COVER**

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F16L 27/10 (2006.01)
F01N 13/18 (2010.01)
F16L 27/111 (2006.01)
F16L 51/02 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC **F16L 27/1004** (2013.01); **F01N 13/1816** (2013.01); **F16L 27/111** (2013.01); **F16L 51/027** (2013.01); **F01N 2470/12** (2013.01); **Y10T 29/4998** (2015.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

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USPC **29/890.08**; **87/35**; **138/109**; **140/92.1**; **60/322**; **285/222.5**, **226**; **72/370.02**, **72/370.04**, **370.1**

See application file for complete search history.

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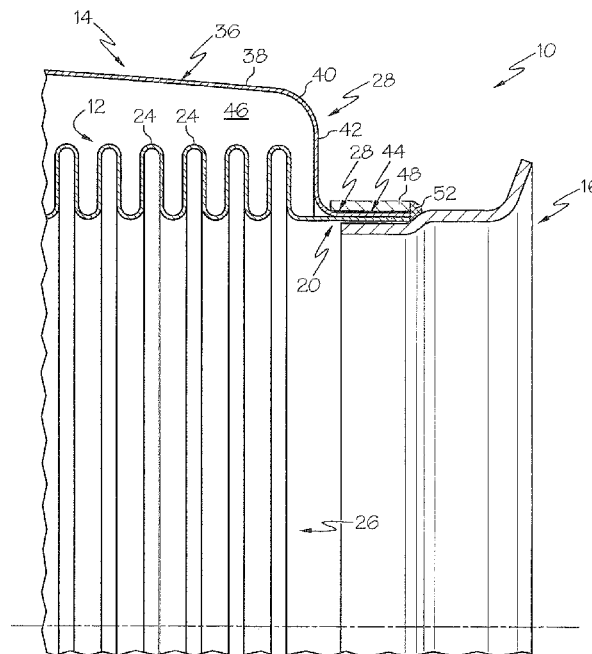
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

An exhaust connection coupler and a method for manufacturing a braid cover incorporated therein are provided.

13 Claims, 8 Drawing Sheets



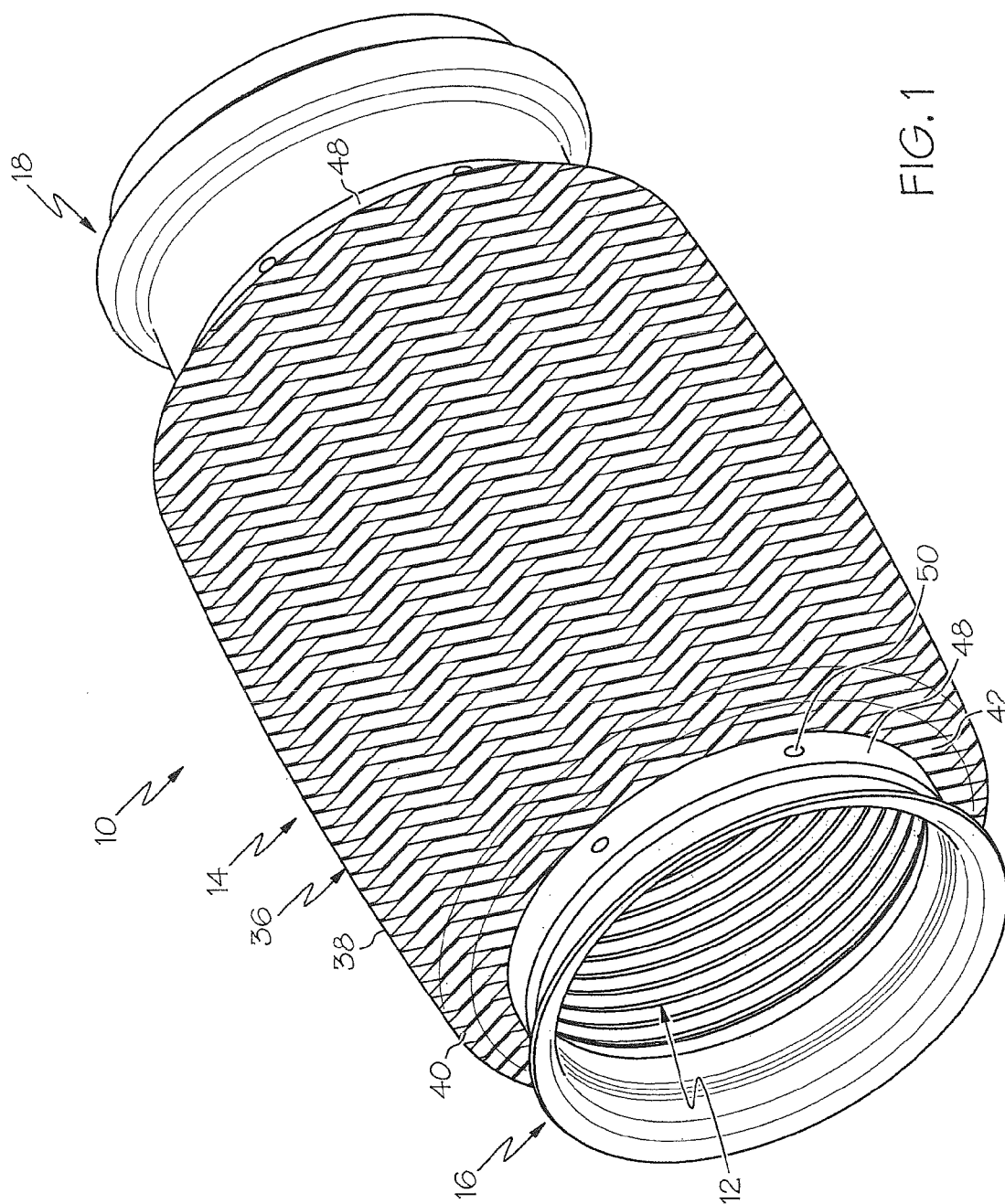


FIG. 1

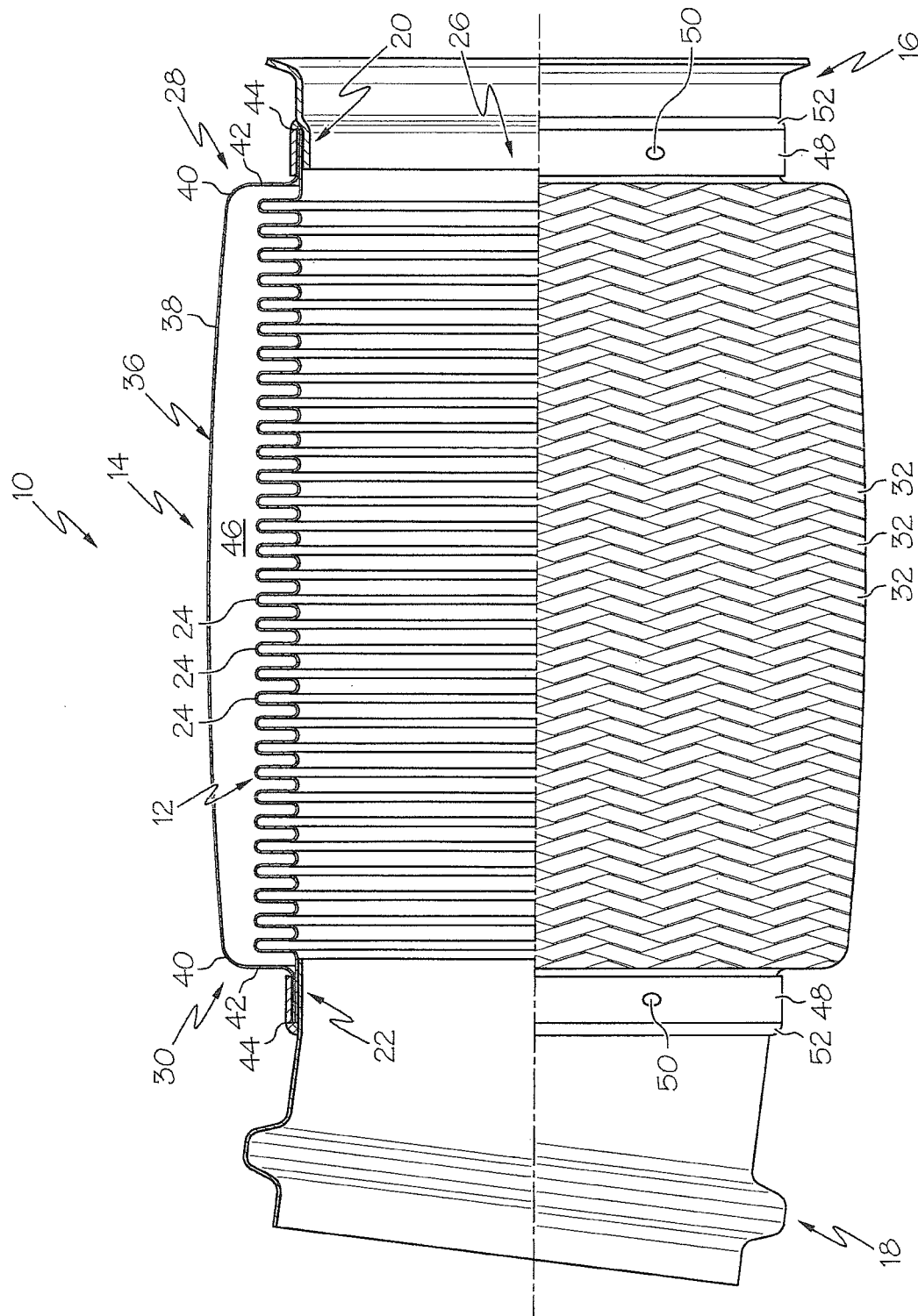
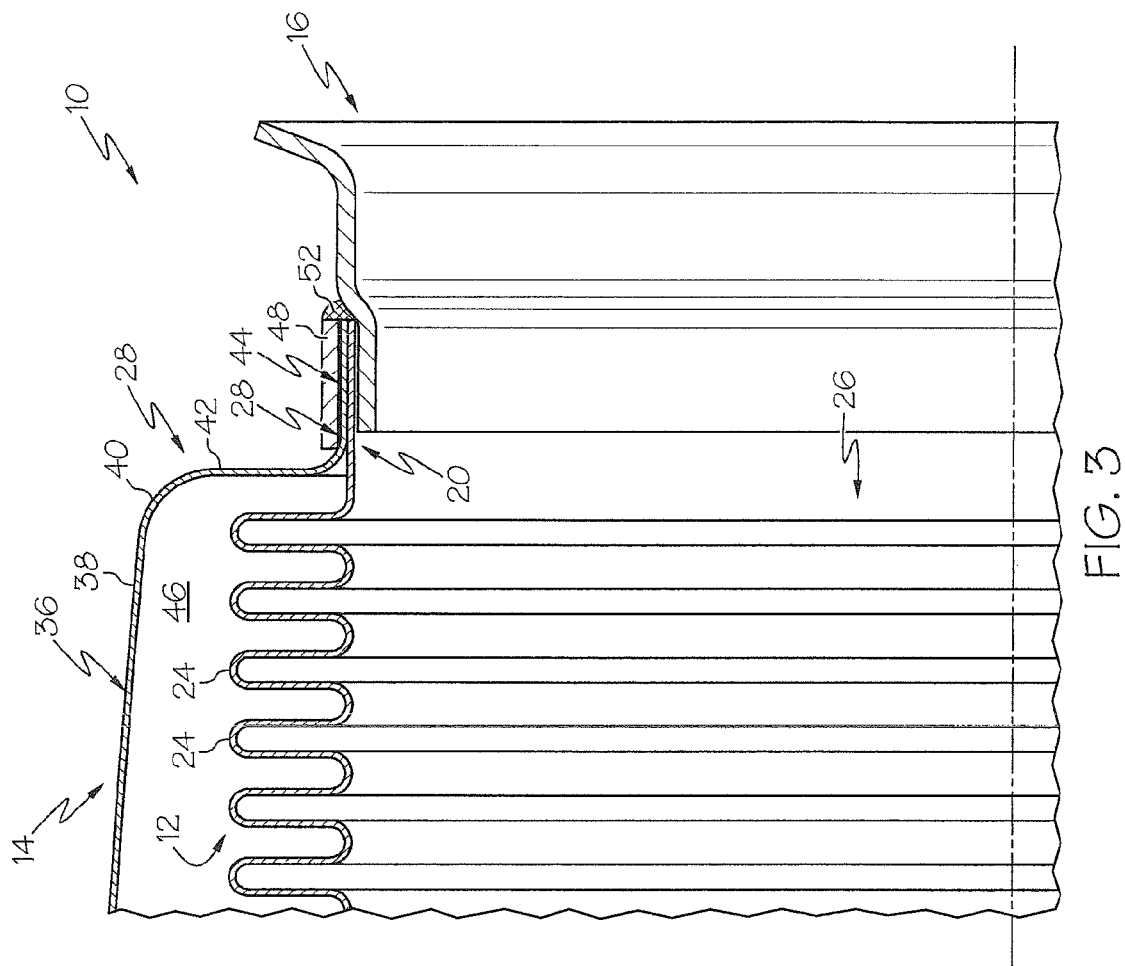


FIG. 2



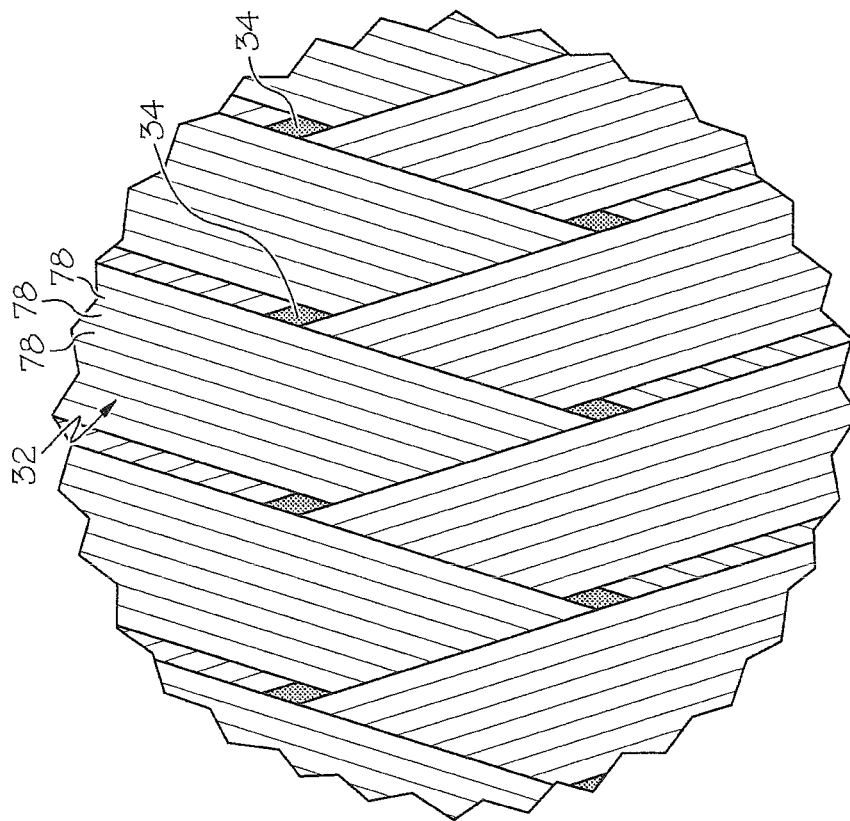


FIG. 4

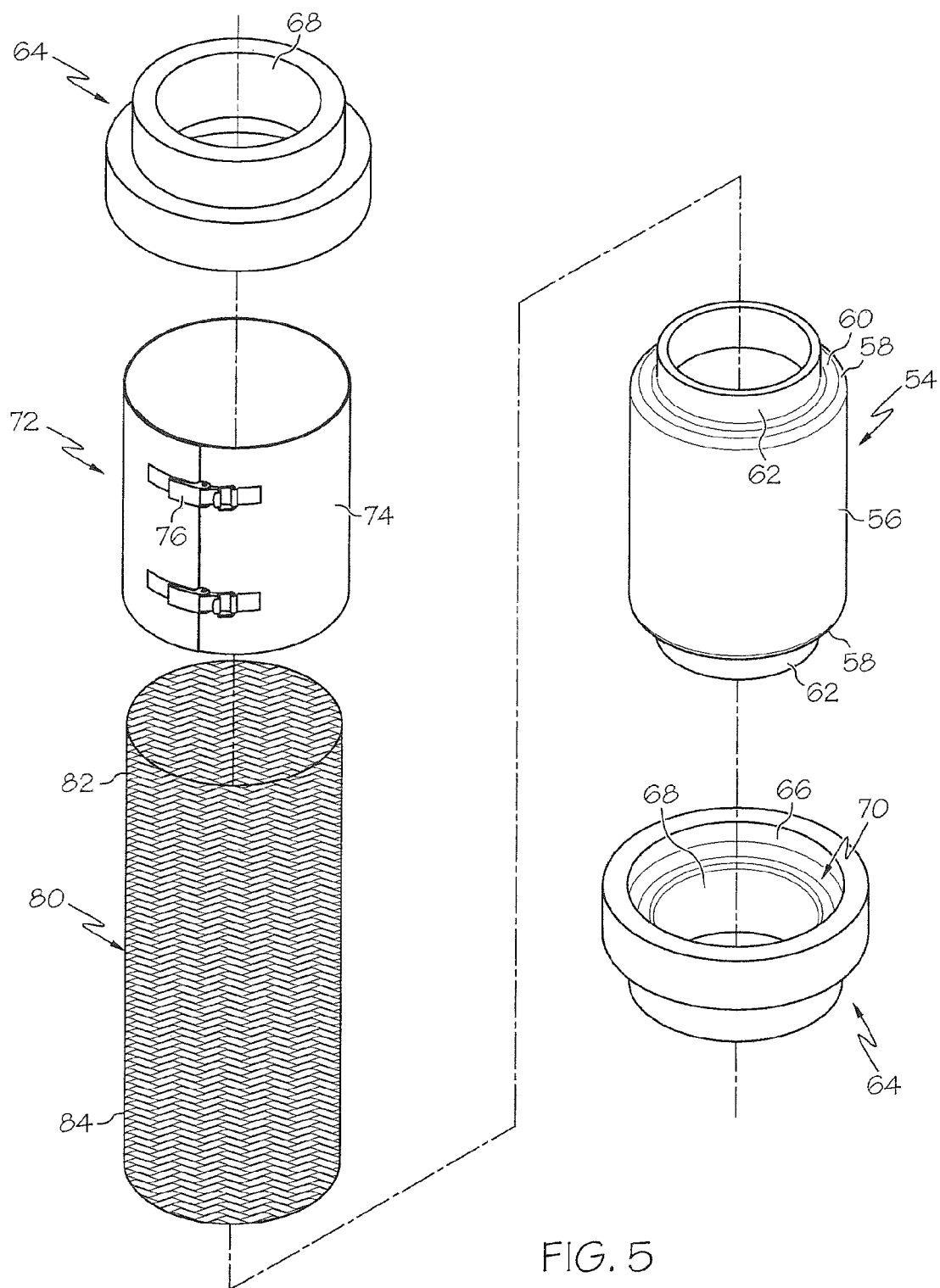


FIG. 5

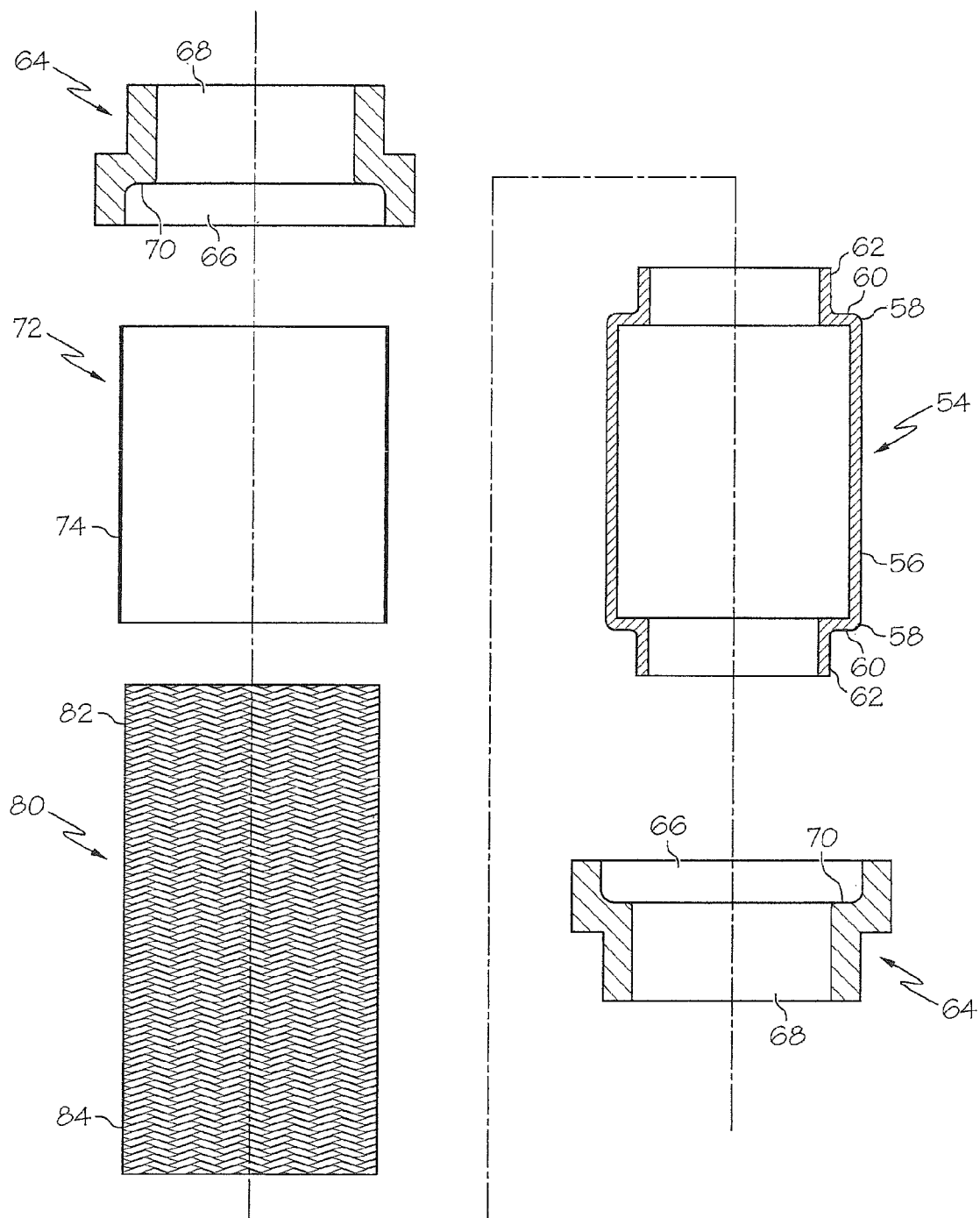
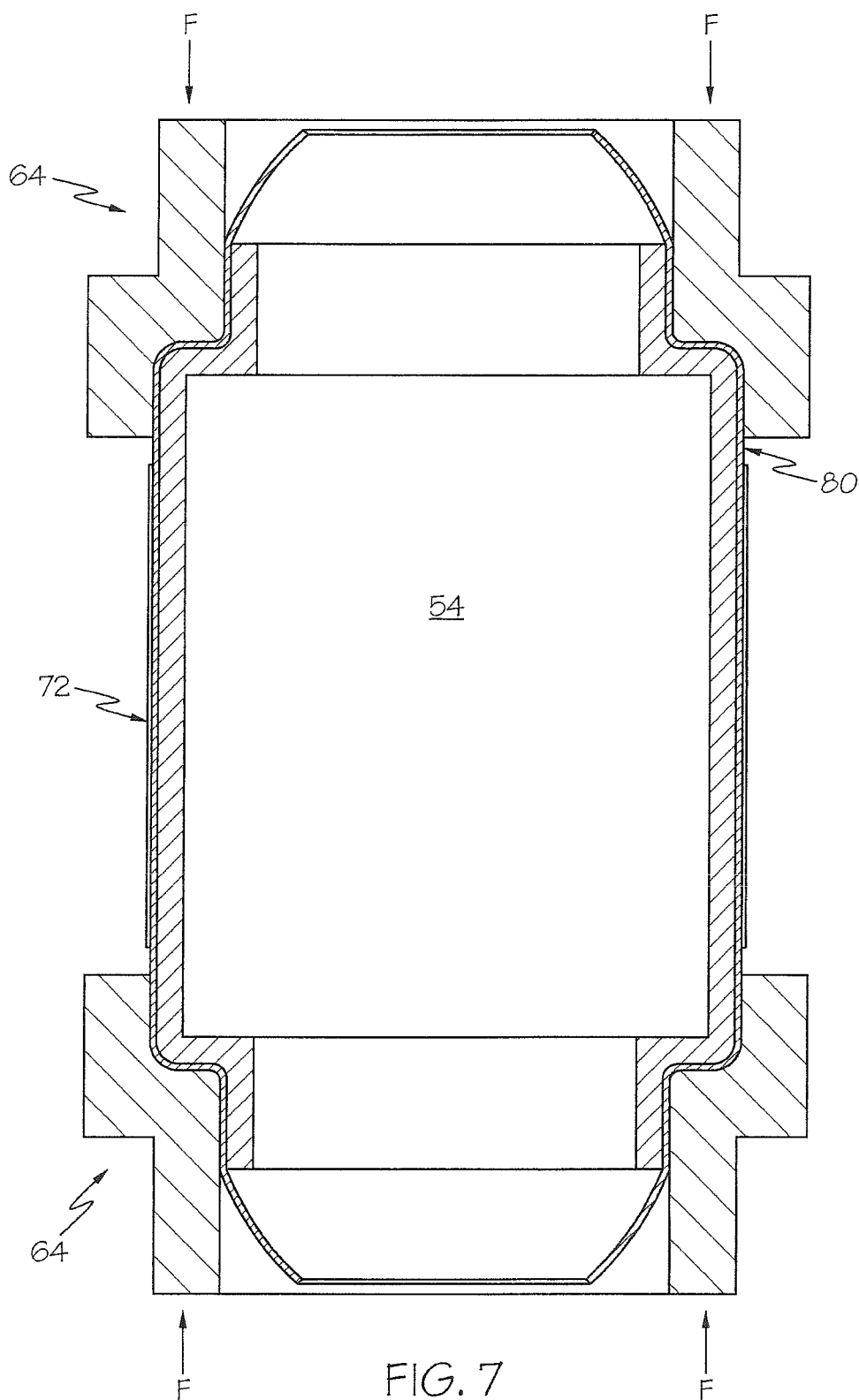


FIG. 6



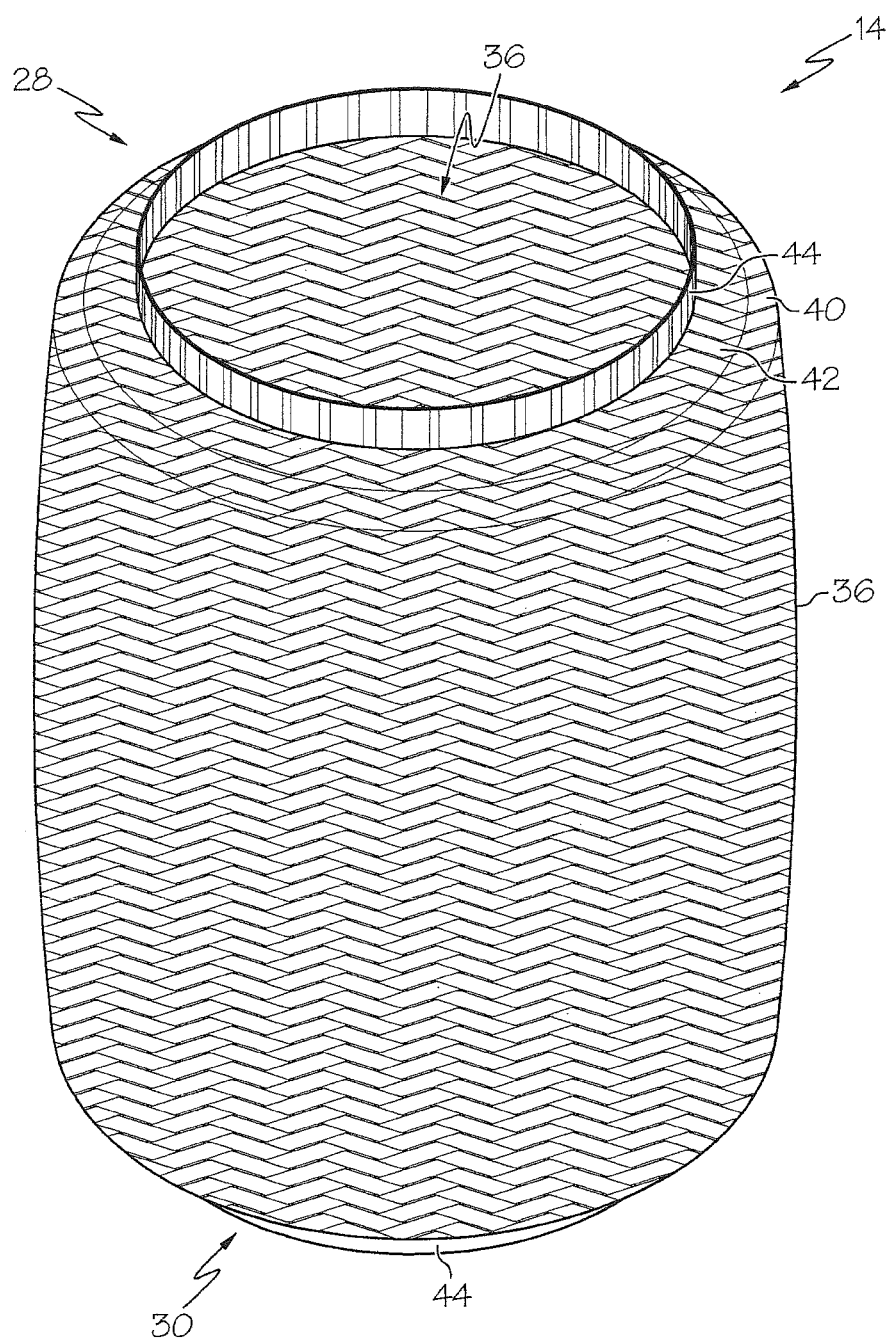


FIG. 8

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EXHAUST CONNECTION MEMBER WITH BRAIDED COVER

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This Application is a continuation of and claims priority to U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/690,122 filed Nov. 20, 2012, which is a divisional of and claims priority to U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/942,684 filed Nov. 9, 2010 to Robert F. Stalcup II, et al. for an Exhaust Connection Member with Preformed Braided Cover, currently pending, the entire disclosure of each of which is incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

As is generally known, some automotive exhaust systems employ a flexible connection member or coupler disposed between two exhaust pipes in order to absorb undesirable vibrations input into the exhaust piping, absorb any thermal expansion or contraction of the exhaust piping, and compensate for any misalignments in the exhaust piping. These couplers are generally formed of an inner flexible metal bellows member and an outer braid cover surrounding the outer periphery of the bellows member. Exemplary of such a coupler is U.S. Pat. No. 5,769,463 to Thomas. The braid cover is normally in very close proximity to, if not in direct contact with, the bellows. Such a placement of the braid cover often leads to friction between the bellows and the braid cover thereby resulting in wearing and premature failure of the bellows and braid cover. In currently known embodiments where the braid cover is spaced at any significant distance from the bellows member, such as in U.S. Pat. No. 6,902,203 to Kang, the braid cover has to be supported by some rigid support means in order to maintain that spacing.

It is well known in the industry that one source of energy loss and inefficiency in internal combustion engines is the loss of heat through exhaust gases. Heat lost through the engine's exhaust gas results in a loss of energy that would otherwise be in the form of mechanical energy produced by the engine. Furthermore, keeping heat in the exhaust gases speeds the gases up in their travel through the exhaust system thereby reducing the amount of back pressure on the engine. Thus, it is desirable for internal combustion engines to have exhaust systems that lose as little heat as possible.

It is also known in the industry to construct the braid cover of many bundles of fine metal wires. The bundles are knitted alternatively to each other in a spiral direction. Normally, the spacing between the bundles and the density of the braid cover is not of importance other than to ensure that the braid cover generally protects the bellows from sand, gravel and other road debris. It is unknown in the prior art to form the braid cover in a manner wherein it creates a thermally insulating layer around the bellows.

Accordingly, a need exists for a braid cover that includes a self-supporting portion spaced at a distance from a bellows member in order to create a meaningful air gap therebetween. A need also exists for a method for manufacturing such a braid cover. A further need exists for a coupler that has increased insulating properties in order to maintain heat within the exhaust gas flowing through the coupler.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention involves the provision of an exhaust connection coupler and a method for manufacturing a braid

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cover incorporated therein. The coupler may include an inner flexible bellows member and an outer braid cover surrounding the bellows member. The braid cover may be formed into a predetermined shape prior to assembly with the remainder of the coupler. The braid member can include a generally cylindrical body section and two end sections each forming necks having diameters that are smaller than the diameter of the body section. Such an arrangement enables the body section of the braid cover to be positioned at a predetermined space from the bellows member. The unique design of the braid cover is such that the body section is self-supporting and does not require any additional support means for maintaining its space from the bellows member. The braid member may be formed of bundles of metallic filaments that are intertwined in a fashion so as to create a dense coverage over the bellows member thereby allowing the braid cover to act as a thermally insulating layer. A thermally insulating air gap is defined between the braid cover and the bellows member in order to increase the amount of heat maintained within exhaust gas flowing through the coupler.

Another aspect of the present invention is directed to a method for manufacturing the braid cover. In this method, wire filaments may be intertwined on a mandrel to form a sleeve-like article. The sleeve-like article may then be shaped with forming dies into a resulting braid cover. In one embodiment, the sleeve-like article is placed around a male forming die and then pressed between the male forming die and a female forming die to shape the article into the desired shape of the braid cover.

Other and further objects of the invention, together with the features of novelty appurtenant thereto, will appear in the course of the following description.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWING

In the accompanying drawing, which forms a part of the specification and is to be read in conjunction therewith in which like reference numerals are used to indicate like or similar parts in the various views:

FIG. 1 is a side perspective view of an exhaust connection coupler in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a cut-away side view of an exhaust connection coupler in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 3 is an enlarged fragmentary cross-sectional side view of an exhaust connection coupler in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 4 is a partially enlarged view illustrating the manner and density at which wire elements may be braided in order to form a cover member in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 5 is an exploded side perspective view of a portion of the tooling used to form the braid cover in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 6 is an exploded cross-sectional side perspective view of a portion of the tooling used to form the braid cover in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 7 is a cross-section side view of illustrating the braid cover being formed by tooling in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention; and

FIG. 8 is a side perspective view of a braid cover in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The invention will now be described with reference to the drawing figures, in which like reference numerals refer to like

parts throughout. For purposes of clarity in illustrating the characteristics of the present invention, proportional relationships of the elements have not necessarily been maintained in the drawing figures.

The present invention is directed generally toward an exhaust connection member or coupler 10 and a method for manufacturing a braid cover 14 incorporated therein. As shown in FIG. 1, the coupler 10 includes a flexible bellows member 12, a braid cover 14 surrounding the bellows member 12, first and second end flanges 16 and 18, and end rings or collars 48 for securing the end parts of the bellows member 12 and braid cover 14 together. The coupler 10 may optionally include an interlock flex liner member (not shown) disposed inwardly of the bellows member 12.

The bellows member 12, which may be formed of a metallic material, is comprised of first and second tube-like ends 20 and 22 with a plurality of repeating corrugations 24 extending therebetween. The bellows member 12 is flexible thereby serving to effectively absorb any linear thermal expansion and contraction of the exhaust piping (not shown) to which the coupler 10 is connected, absorb undesirable vibrations input into the exhaust piping and compensate for misalignments in the exhaust piping. The bellows member 12 defines a passageway 26 through which the exhaust gases flow.

As illustrated in FIGS. 2 and 3, the braid cover 14 surrounds an outer periphery of the bellows member 12. The braid cover 14 serves to dampen vibrations, protect the bellows member 12, prevent elongation of the bellows member 12 under pressure and form a thermally insulating dead space around the bellows member 12 in order to maintain heat within the exhaust gases flowing therethrough.

The braid member 14 is formed of many ribbon-like bundles 32 of parallel metallic wire filaments 78. In one embodiment, the bundles 32 are fashioned from a plurality of metal wires filaments 78 that are generally in side by side contact with one another to form a substantially solid ribbon. The bundles 32 may be intertwined (e.g., interlaced, braided, knitted, woven, looped or the like) together on an elongated mandrel (not shown) to form a flexible, fabric-type cylindrical article.

As seen in FIG. 4, two opposing inside edges of two adjacent bundles 32 (extending parallel to each other in a first spiral direction) and two opposing inside edges of two other adjacent bundles 32 (extending parallel to each other in a second spiral direction) cooperate to define a slight rectangular or diamond-shaped aperture 34. In order for the braid cover 14 to effectively form a thermally insulating layer around the air space 46 defined between the bellows member 12 and the braid cover 14, the braid cover 14 needs to have a tight pattern in order to provide a dense coverage. The overall total opening of the apertures 34 with respect to the overall area of the outer surface of the cover 14 should be between about 0.5% and 20%, and more preferably between about 0.5% and 10%. This high-density pattern is the result of tightly intertwining a plurality of metal wire bundles 32. The high-density pattern results in a braid cover 14 wherein only a very minimal amount of air from the air space 46 may permeate therethrough. The combination of the air gap 46 and the high-density braid cover 14 serves to reduce the amount of heat that is lost from the exhaust gases as they travel through the coupler 10. The air gap 46 acts as a thermally insulating dead air space surrounding the bellows member 12 to maintain heat within the exhaust gas flowing through the coupler 10. The braid cover's 14 high-density pattern further provides the bellows member 12 with increased protection from water, melting salt, sand, gravel and other road debris.

As depicted, the braid cover's first and second ends 28 and 30 are formed into shape such that a middle body portion 36 of the cover 14 is maintained at a predetermined space from and is not in contact with the bellow corrugations 24. This not only prevents wearing and premature failure of the bellows member 12 and braid cover 14 thereby resulting in the coupler 10 having a longer life, but also serves to create the insulating air gap 46 defined between the bellows member 12 and braid cover 14. Each end 28 and 30 may be reduced to form a neck portion 44 having a smaller diameter than the body portion 36. Stated differently, the body portion 36 may extend radially outwardly from and have a larger diameter than each neck portion 44. The body portion 36 and at least one of the neck portions 44 may be generally cylindrical in shape.

As shown in the figures, each end 28 and 30 is formed to include a neck 44 and a shoulder 42 extending radially outwardly from the neck 44 to meet the body portion 36 at a corner 40. The shoulder 42 and the body portion's wall 38 may converge so as to be generally perpendicular with one another. This, in combination with the corner 40 having a relatively small radius and the bundles 32 being tightly braided, establishes increased rigidity in the braid cover 14 such that the body portion 36 may be self-supporting between the two shoulders 42. Unlike the known prior art having an outer braid cover disposed an appreciable distance from the bellows, embodiments of the braid cover 14 in the present invention do not require any additional support means in order to maintain a predetermined space from the bellows member corrugations 24. It should be noted, however, that the angle in which the shoulder 42 meets the wall 38 may be greater than or less than 90 degrees and the corners 40 may be of any suitable radius, so long as the body portion 36 maintains adequate rigidity to be self supporting between the shoulders 42.

While both ends 28 and 30 of the braid member 14 are shown as being formed into substantially the same shape in the figures, it should be understood that the two ends 28 and 30 may be formed into different shapes or that, alternatively, only one end 28 may be formed into a desired shape while the other end 30 may remain in the in generally the same shape as when formed on the mandrel.

The bellows member ends 20 and 22 may be combined with or secured to the braid cover ends 28 and 30, respectively, with a retainer. The retainer may be comprised of a support ring or collar 48, a spot weld 50, a clamping member, any suitable fastener, or any combination thereof. As best illustrated in FIG. 3, the retainer may also secure the bellow member ends 20 and 22 and braid cover ends 28 and 30 to an outer surface of the flanges 16 and 18. As shown in FIGS. 2 and 3, the end rings 48 are fit on the flanges 16 and 18 in such a manner as to sandwich the bellow member ends 20 and 22 together with the braid cover ends 28 and 30 between the end rings and flanges 16 and 18. As may be appreciated by a plurality of spot welds 50, the bellows member 12, the braid cover 14 and the end rings 49 may be integrally connected to each other by way of welding. The end rings 48 may further be secured to the flanges 16 and 18 by way of a weld 52 or other suitable attachment means. It should be understood, however, that the bellows member 12 and braid cover 14 may be coupled with the flanges 16 and 18 or directly to the exhaust pipes (not shown) by any suitable fastening means, including welding, clamping, riveting, bolting, screwing or the like. It should further be understood that the flanges 16 and 18 may be of any suitable shape and length and may comprise an elbow or offset angle if desired. Additionally, it will be

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appreciated that the end rings **48** may be of any suitable shape and may each include a flared or upturned end as is commonly known in the art.

Turning attention now to the manner in which the braid cover **14** is manufactured, focus is drawn toward FIGS. **5-8**. As set forth above, wire filaments **78**, in the form of bundles **32**, may be intertwined (e.g., interlaced, braided, knitted, woven, looped or the like) together on an elongated mandrel (not shown) to form a flexible, sleeve-like cylindrical article **80** like that depicted in FIGS. **5** and **6**. The sleeve-like article **80**, which has first and second ends **82** and **84**, may have a generally uniform cross-sectional area about its entire length. In the manufacturing process, the sleeve-like article **80** is formed into the braid cover **14**.

Upon the construction of the sleeve-like article **80**, one or both ends **82** or **84** of the article **80** are formed into shape so as to include a neck **44** and a shoulder **42** extending radially outwardly from the neck **44** which meets a body portion **36** at a corner **40**, like described above and illustrated in FIG. **8** among others. This forming may be undertaken by any suitable method and through the use of a variety of tooling and equipment. In one embodiment, forming dies **54** and **64** are employed. As shown best in FIG. **6**, the outer profile of a male forming die **54** and the inner profile of a female forming die **64** generally dictate the shape of the completed braid cover **14**. In one embodiment, the sleeve-like article **80** is placed over or around the male forming die **54** which may be inserted into a female forming die **64** with the article **80** being located and compressed therebetween.

As shown, the male forming die **54** includes a body section **56** and ends having a neck section **62** and a shoulder section **60** extending radially outwardly from the neck section **62** and meeting the body section **56** at a corner **58**. The cross-sectional area of the neck section **62** is less than the cross-sectional area of the body section **56**. Thus, in one embodiment, the neck section may be generally cylindrical and have a diameter that is less than the diameter of the body section **56**. Again, the outer profile of the male forming die **54** may generally dictate the shape of the finished braid cover **14**.

The female forming die **64** may include an inner profile that generally resembles the outer profile of the male forming die **54**. Depending upon the thickness of the article **80**, the inner profile of the female forming die **64** may be slightly larger than the outer profile of the male forming die **54** so as to accommodate the article **80** therebetween. As shown, the female forming die **64** includes a first, larger diameter cavity portion **66** sized and shaped to accommodate at least a portion of the male forming die's body section **56** and a second, smaller diameter cavity portion **68** sized and shaped to accommodate at least a portion of the male forming die's neck section **62**. A shoulder **70**, resembling the shoulder **60** of the male forming dies **54**, extends radially between the first and second cavity portions **66** and **68**.

After the sleeve-like article **80** is formed, for example on a mandrel, it may be placed around the male forming die **54**. Once on the male forming die **54**, the article may be held against the body section **56** of the die **54** with a cinching or retaining device **72** that may be comprised of piece of sheet metal **74** and clamps or buckles **76**. Any other suitable means for holding the article **80** against the die **54** may be used as well.

As illustrated in FIG. **7**, in order to form the sleeve-like article **80** into the braid cover **14**, one or more end portions of the male forming die **54** with the article **80** placed therearound may be inserted into one or more female forming dies **64**. The ends **82** and **84** of the article **80** are located and compressed between the male forming die **54** and one or more female

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forming dies **64**. As shown in FIG. **7**, the dies **54** and **64** may be aligned with one another and a force **F** applied in an axial direction to bring the dies **54** and **64** together with the article **80** therebetween. In one embodiment, the dies **54** and **64** are placed in a press (e.g., hydraulic, pneumatic or mechanical press) which generates the force **F**. In such an embodiment, one female forming die **64** may be mounted to a base of the press and a second female forming die **64** may be mounted to the press's ram. The male forming die **54** may be aligned and placed therebetween. Once in the male forming die **54** is in position, the ram may be extended thereby compressing the male forming die **54** and article **80** between the two female forming dies **64** like shown in FIG. **7**. When the ram is retracted, the retaining device **72** may be removed from around the sleeve **80** and the sleeve **80**, which is now in the form of the braid cover **14**, may be removed from the male forming die **54**. One of the formed ends **28** or **30** may be slightly expanded in order to remove the braid cover **14** from the die **54**. The material forming the end **28** or **30** may have "memory" and once removed from the die **54**, the end **28** or **30** may generally contract back to the diameter it was formed into between the dies **54** and **64**.

When the braid cover **14** has two formed ends **28** and **30**, as shown in the figures, it is contemplated that the ends **28** and **30** may either be formed simultaneously or may be formed one at a time. Additionally, the braid cover **14** may only have one formed end **28** or **30**. Further yet, it is within the scope of this invention that the braid cover **14** may be formed by intertwining the bundles **32** of wire filaments **78** onto a mandrel having a profile resembling the male forming die **54**, as opposed to constructing a sleeve-like article **80** and then pressing the article **80** into shape with the dies **54** and **64**.

Upon the formation of the sleeve **80** into the braid member **14**, the braid member **14** may be assembled with the remainder of the coupler **10** as in FIGS. **1-3**.

From the foregoing, it will be seen that this invention is one well adapted to attain all the ends and objects hereinabove set forth together with other advantages which are obvious and which are inherent to the structure. It will be understood that certain features and sub combinations are of utility and may be employed without reference to other features and sub combinations. This is contemplated by and is within the scope of the claims. Since many possible embodiments of the invention may be made without departing from the scope thereof, it is also to be understood that all matters herein set forth or shown in the accompanying drawings are to be interpreted as illustrative and not limiting.

The constructions described above and illustrated in the drawings are presented by way of example only and are not intended to limit the concepts and principles of the present invention. Thus, there has been shown and described several embodiments of a novel invention. As is evident from the foregoing description, certain aspects of the present invention are not limited by the particular details of the examples illustrated herein, and it is therefore contemplated that other modifications and applications, or equivalents thereof, will occur to those skilled in the art. The terms "having" and "including" and similar terms as used in the foregoing specification are used in the sense of "optional" or "may include" and not as "required". Many changes, modifications, variations and other uses and applications of the present construction will, however, become apparent to those skilled in the art after considering the specification and the accompanying drawings. All such changes, modifications, variations and other uses and applications which do not depart from the spirit and scope of the invention are deemed to be covered by the invention which is limited only by the claims which follow.

What is claimed is:

1. A coupler for an exhaust system, comprising:

a flexible bellows including a generally cylindrical corrugated body that is formed from a metallic material,

a braid cover including (i) a neck, and (ii) a body section extending over the bellows from a first end to a second end such that a gap is defined between at least portion of the body section of the braid cover and the corrugated body of the bellows, and

a retainer secured to the corrugated body and the neck of the braid cover,

wherein the neck of the braid cover is received in a pocket defined in the retainer, the pocket being closed at one end, and

wherein (i) the body section of the braid cover has an outer-most diameter, (ii) the generally cylindrical corrugated body has an outer-most diameter, and (iii) the retainer has an outer-most diameter that is less than the outer-most diameter of the body section of the braid cover and the outer-most diameter of the generally cylindrical corrugated body.

2. The coupler of claim 1, wherein the retainer includes a collar positioned radially outward of the neck of the braid cover and extending circumferentially over the neck, the collar partially defining the closed pocket.

3. The coupler of claim 1, wherein the body section of the braid cover is configured to be self-supporting.

4. The coupler of claim 2, wherein the retainer further includes an end piece, the end piece having a flange including a flange section that is positioned radially inward of the neck of the braid cover such that the neck extends circumferentially over the flange section, the flange cooperating with the collar to partially define the closed pocket.

5. The coupler of claim 4, wherein the collar and the end piece are joined by a weld.

6. A coupler for an exhaust system, comprising:

a bellows including a generally cylindrical corrugated body that is formed from a metallic material, the generally cylindrical corrugated body having an outer-most diameter,

a braid cover extending over the bellows, the braid cover including a body section having a first diameter, an end section including a neck having a second diameter that is less than the first diameter, a shoulder extending radially between the body section and the neck, the shoulder forming a stiffened corner to provide the cover with rigidity, and

a retainer secured to the corrugated body and the braid cover,

wherein the neck of the braid cover is received in a pocket defined in the retainer, the pocket being closed at one end, and

wherein the retainer includes a collar positioned radially outward of the neck of the braid cover, the collar partially defining the closed pocket, and

wherein the retainer has an outer-most diameter that is less than the first diameter of the body section of the braid cover and the outer-most diameter of the generally cylindrical corrugated body.

7. The coupler of claim 6, wherein the collar is positioned radially inward from the stiffened corner.

8. The coupler of claim 7, wherein the body section of the braid cover is configured to be self-supporting.

9. The coupler of claim 6, wherein the retainer further includes an end piece, the end piece having a flange that cooperates with the collar to partially define the closed pocket.

10. The coupler of claim 6, wherein a thermally insulating gap is defined between the braid cover and the bellows to maintain heat within exhaust gas flowing through the coupler.

11. The coupler of claim 10, wherein the braid cover forms a thermally insulating layer surrounding the gap.

12. The coupler of claim 6, wherein the bellows defines an innermost layer of the coupler.

13. A coupler for an exhaust system, comprising:

a flexible bellows including a generally cylindrical corrugated body that is formed from a metallic material,

a braid cover including (i) a neck, and (ii) a body section extending over the bellows from a first end to a second end such that a gap is defined between at least portion of the body section of the braid cover and the corrugated body of the bellows, and

a retainer secured to the corrugated body and the neck of the braid cover, such that the neck and an end of the corrugated body is received in a pocket having one closed end defined in the retainer,

wherein (i) the body section of the braid cover has an outer-most diameter, (ii) the generally cylindrical corrugated body has an outer-most diameter, and (iii) the retainer has an outer-most diameter that is less than the outer-most diameter of the body section of the braid cover and the outer-most diameter of the generally cylindrical corrugated body.

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